DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 305 658 CS 211 783

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TITLE Utilizing Literature within the School Curriculum.
PUB DATE 89
NOTE 10p.; For a related document, see CS 009 606.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Childrens Literature; *Curriculum Development; Elementary Secondary Education; Reading Aloud to Others; Reading Comprehension; *Reading Instruction; Story Grammar
IDENTIFIERS Reading Motivation; Story Structure

ABSTRACT

The incorporation of literature into the school curriculum is perceived as an important way to involve students in "real world" reading. To maximize the use of literature in the school curriculum, teachers need to concentrate on three areas: (1) modeling for students; (2) developing a sense of story; and (3) enhancing comprehension skills through the use of literature. Literature should be viewed as an integral part of the school curriculum, not as a separate add-on. (An example of a structured overview of a simple story is included.) (Author/MM)

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Utilizing Literature Within the School Curriculum

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Author Notes

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Abstract

The incorporation of literature into the school curriculum is perceived as an important way to involve students in "real world" reading. In order to maximize the use of literature in the school curriculum, teachers need to concentrate on three areas: a) modeling for students; b) developing a sense of story; and c) enhancing comprehension skills through the use of literature. Literature should be viewed as an integral part of the school curriculum, not as a separate add-on.

At the present time, we are witnessing a movement to incorporate literature in the classroom not only to supplement reading activities but also as an important element in teaching language arts. This has been extended across the curriculum as in the whole language approach (Hittlemen, 1988). The impetus for this movement has occurred largely as a result of research in the area of reading which has supported the need for meaning-based as opposed to skills-based approaches to the teaching of reading (Pearson and Tierney, 1984; Smith, 1985). In these approaches to reading, comprehension--an understanding of what is read by the reader--is the goal of reading instruction. Reading is viewed as a whole process which requires an interaction between the reader, what he/she brings to the text by way of the schemata (prior knowledge) which is possessed by the reader, and the message that the author is presenting in the text by way of exploration of ideas concerning narratives or new information to be learned or to be enjoyed by the reader.

The rationale for incorporating children's literature in the curriculum includes the fact that children are stimulated by "real world" reading. The desire to learn to read is often better promoted through the use of literature than through a strict basal reader approach (Pointer, 1975) in which the language utilized may often be stilted and

plots very boring. This is in part due to the fact that authors of basal reader stories many times must deal with restricted vocabulary lists, especially in the early grades. By nature, successful authors of children's books know how to tell a good story. They grab the reader's attention and hold it while their tales unfold. This is very important, especially for beginning readers whose attention span may be limited as well as for many remedial readers who have not developed a sense of "story" or what the reading process is all about. The wide variance of interest areas which is represented in literature is also significant as children explore books on topics which they deem appealing.

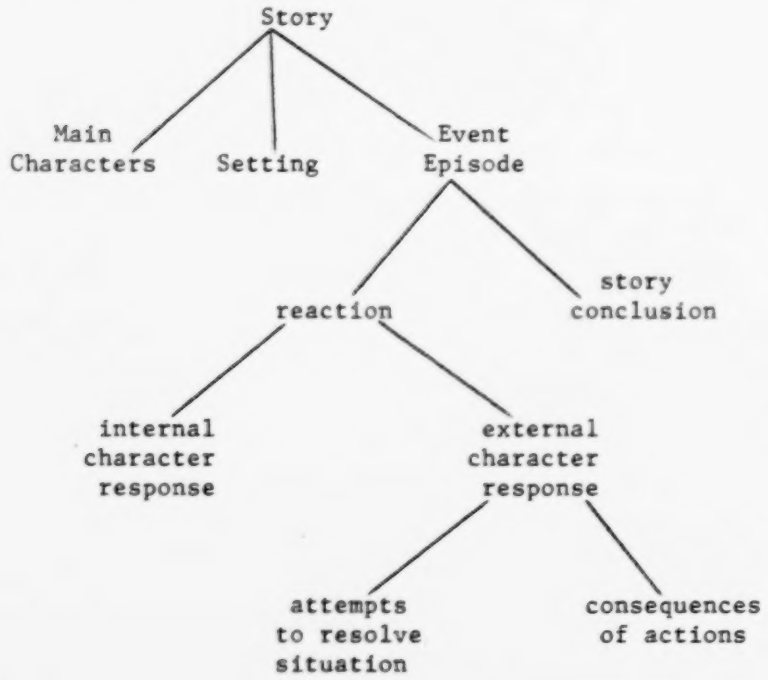
For the classroom teacher who would like to incorporate literature into an existing curriculum, there are three areas that need to be considered: a) modeling; b) developing a sense of story; and c) enhancing comprehension skills through the use of literature. In terms of modeling, there are many children who are entering our schools today who have not been read to at home. These children lack the knowledge that listening to a story is a pleasurable experience which can be repeated again and again. They do not know that the funny lines and squiggles on papers in a "book" contain meaningful information. Therefore, the prerequisite desire to learn how to read may be lacking, as well as an understanding of what the concept "book" is all

about. The teacher can help students' understanding of the reading process by taking time out to read orally each day to the class, a minimum of fifteen minutes. Students will also learn much about how to interpret sentences through listening to the teacher's expression of his/her voice as the reading process proceeds, thereby providing good modeling for oral reading. Students will also notice how enthusiastic a teacher becomes about reading, and will see other children becoming excited by listening to a good story. This in turn will promote the necessary motivation to want to learn to read as children are influenced by their teachers and peers.

Reading aloud should not cease with the first three grades, but should continue through the middle school/junior high. Many adults harbor fond memories of individual teachers who read to them in the upper grades and will even recall the particular stories they heard. The message they received as students was clear: reading is important.

The second area concerns developing a sense of "story" or what we call "story grammar" (Rumelhart, 1975). In order for children to respond to the story as a whole, they have to have an understanding of the elements involved in the story: the setting, plot structure, characters, and events in the story. Otherwise, they may "hear" the story, but not be truly "listening" to the story. Each culture has its own story grammar; the story grammar utilized in most Western

writing is very linear and moves from the beginning to the middle to the end in a forthright fashion. Students from other cultures, such as oriental cultures, may be used to a completely different story grammar and therefore find themselves frustrated in their understanding of stories as presented in basal readers and literature books. Therefore, it is important for all readers to explore the structure of the story they are reading individually or as groups. By utilizing an approach such as creating a structured overview for stories as seen in Example 1, teachers can help develop this sense of story with their students.



Structured Overview of Simple Story
Example 1.

Lastly, literature can be utilized by the teacher to enhance comprehension skills. This can be accomplished through the use of basic questioning skills concerning characters in the story, events which occurred in the story, and making up their own endings to stories and comparing them with the authors' endings. The cloze procedure can be used by taking passages from books and making deletions which students proceed to fill indicating their understanding of the materials (the cloze procedure is described in numerous textbooks on reading instruction in the classroom).

In conclusion, we must note that the inclusion of literature in the curriculum is not limited to the above considerations. This is just a beginning list. Many of you are already using techniques such as Sustained Silent Reading (which employs reading of trade books) in your classrooms and schools. The important element to remember from the above discussion is that literature should be considered within the context of the school curriculum, not as a separate add-on. In elevating the use of literature to this position within classrooms and schools, the students ultimately benefit as they not only are developing their own rationales for why they need to read but they also develop their desires to read.

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